

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEGUCIGALPA 4310

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: CONVERSATION WITH RICARDO ZUNIGA - MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

BEGIN SUMMARY: POLOFF HAD CONVERSATION WITH RICARDO ZUNIGA ON OCTOBER 1. ZUNIGA SAID THAT 17 MEMBERS OF THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAVE BEEN HAVING INTERMITTENT MEETINGS SINCE SEPTEMBER 26. HE STATED THAT 29 COMMISSIONS DEALING WITH EL SALVADOR AND RESTRUCTURING THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT WERE SET UP AND ARE EXPECTED TO MAKE THEIR REPORTS TO THE 17-MAN GROUP ON OCTOBER 1. HE REMARKED THAT THERE IS CONSIDERABLE SENTIMENT IN FAVOR OF REMOVING FONMIN GALVEZ, MINFIN ZAVALA, DEFMIN CHINCHILLA, COLONEL OMAR ZELAYA (FSP) AND RICARDO REYES (HEAD OF COHDEFOR). HE SAID THAT THERE WERE A NUMBER OF CIRITICISMS DURING THE MEETINGS OF HOW CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR IS DIRECTING THE GOVERNMENT, EVEN THOUGH THERE IS NO MOVE AT THIS TIME TO REMOVE HIM FROM OFFICE. END SUMMARY.

1. POLOFF HAD CONVERSATION WITH RICARDO ZUNIGA AGUSTINUS, LEADER OF THE NATIONALIST PARTY, ON OCTOBER 1. ZUNIGA SAID THAT THE SUPERIOR DEFENSE COUNCIL HAS BEEN MEETING SINCE SEPTEMBER 26, AND REMARKED THAT THE MEETINGS ARE UNUSUAL BECAUSE ONLY 17. MEMBERS OF THE 27 MEMBER BODY ARE IN ATTENDANCE. HE COMMENTED THAT 15 OF THOSE ATTENDING ARE IN COMMAND OF UNITS WHILE THE ONLY OTHERS PRESENT ARE LT. COLONEL CESAR ELVIR SIERRA, CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF, AND

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LT. COLONEL MARIO FONSECA LOPEZ, DIRECTOR OF THE FRANCISCO

MORAZAN MILITARY ACADEMY. HE COMMENTED THAT CHIEF OF STATE MELGAR IS NOT ATTENDING THE MEETINGS AND OBSERVED THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN SUBJECTED TO A NUMBER OF CRITICISMS DURING THE MEETINGS.

2. ZUNIGA SAID THAT THE GOUP HAD CREATED TWO COMMISSIONS: ONE COMMISSION IS ANALYZING THE SALVADORAN SITUATION WHILE THE OTHER IS CHARGED WITH STUDYING THE RESTRUCTURING OF THE GOVERNMENT. ACCORDING TO ZUNIGA, THE COMMISSION CONCERNED WITH EL SALVADOR IS NOT ANALYZING THE OVERALL STAT OF RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES, BUT IS INSTEAD CONSIDERING THE FEASIBILITY OF PURCHASING MORE ARMS TO DEAL WITH WHAT THE LT. COLONELS BELIEVE TO BE INCREASING ARMS PURCHASES BY EL SALVADOR. HE SAID THAT THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT RESTRUCTURING WOULD BE CONSIDERING THE REPLACEMENT OF VARIOUS IMPORTANT OFFICIALS INCLUDING, AMONG OTHERS, FONMIN GALVEZ, MINFIN ZAVALA, MINDEF CHINCHILLA, COLONEL OMAR ZELAYA (CHIEF OF THE NATIONAL POLICE) AND RICARDO REYES (DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL FORESTRY CORPORATION). HE REMARKED THAT BOTH COMMISSIONS WERE SUPPOSED TO PRESENT THEIR REPORTS BY THE AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 1. HE SAID IF THE LT. COLONELS AGREE ON THE PROPOSED CHANGES, THE ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD BE MADE ON OCTOBER 3 (DAY OF THE SOLDIER) OR OCTOBER 21 (ARMED FORCES DAY).

3. ZUNIGA SAID THE LT. COLONELS ARE NOT ATTEMPTING TO REMOVE MELGAR AT THIS TIME, BUT THAT THEIR ACTIONS ARE PROGRESSIVELY UNDERMINING HIS POSITION. HE SPECULATED THAT A TRIUMVIRATE MAY EVENTUALLY REPLACE MELGAR IF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE CONTINTUES TO MOUNT IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT. HE POINTED OUT THAT THE LT. COLONELS ARE AWARE OF SEVERAL GROUPS OF CAPTAINS AND MAJORS WHO ARE TALKING ABOUT MAKING CHANGES IN THE PRESENT SYSTEM.

4. COMMENT: ZUNIGA'S COMMENTS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP RING TRUE. THERE ARE CONTINUED RUMORS ABOUT DISSATISFACTION WITH THE WAY THE GOVERNMENT IS BEING DIRECTED AND WITH THIS OR THAT MINISTER OR OTHER PUBLIC OFFICIAL. THE BASIC QUESTION IS WHETHER THERE IS ENOUGH UNITY WITHIN THE GROUP TO AGREE ON CHANGES WITHIN THE CONFIDENTIAL

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GOVERNMENTAL APPARATUS AT THIS TIME. IT IS QUITE CONCEIVABLE THAT THEY WILL NOT TAKE ANY ACTION AT ALL BECAUSE THEY MAY NOT BE ABLE TO AGREE ON WHICH OFFICIALS TO REPLACE OR WITH NAMING REPLACEMENTS TO THOSE POSITIONS. THE POSSIBLE REPLACEMENT OF MELGAR PRESENTS A SIMILAR PROBLEM FOR THE GROUP BECAUSE IT WILL BE VERY DIFFICULT FOR THEM TO COME TO AN AGREEMENT ON A SUCCESSOR. IN THAT REGARD, IT SEEMS THAT THE SELECTION OF ONE INDIVIDUAL IS OUT OF THE QUESTION

GIVEN THE NATURE OF THE LT. COLONELS' GROUP, AND THAT A
DECISION TO REMOVE MELGAR WOULD HAVE TO BE CUPLED WITH THE
NAMING OF A TRIUMVIRATE, A HISTORICALLY UNSTABLE GOVERNING
MECHANISM. IN ADDITION, WHILE THE MUTTERINGS AND PLOTTINGS
OF OTHER GROUPS IN THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT ARE NOT YET
SERIOUS, THEY COULD EVENTUALLY BECOME DANGEROUS AND IT IS OBVIOUS THAT

THE LT. COLONELS ARE AWARE OF THAT POSSIBILITY.
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